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Squad asks aid to keep recovery going

Forks EMS says funds held by township would help pay off its debts.

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For the past 12 months, the board of directors and the staff of the Forks Township Emergency Squad have worked to put their faltering ambulance service back on the right track.

It hasn't been easy, Board Chairman William Keifer Jr. said, recalling that from July 2006 to April 1, 2007, the service was shut down while the board sought ways to reduce its \$278,000 debt and to try to recoup \$700,000 in uncollected service charges and \$21,000 stolen by its former director.

On Saturday, the squad will hold an open house to show what has been accomplished since service resumed last April.

But Thursday night, Keifer addressed township supervisors, saying he'd like for the township to take \$10,000 that it budgeted but has never given to Forks EMS, and instead pay it to Palmer-based Suburban EMS.

Keifer said Forks EMS owes Suburban \$27,300, but \$3,000 of that was incurred before Keifer and a new board took over last April.

The supervisors so far this year have declined to give the Forks EMS any of the budgeted money. In fact, they put \$20,000 in last year's budget and never provided any to the Forks EMS.

Keifer said that under the contract it has with Suburban, Forks EMS bills all service calls and is supposed to send \$150 for each trip to Suburban. Keifer admitted he hasn't done this, using the money to keep the township ambulance service going and to override the huge debts it inherited.

Barry Albertson, Suburban's director, said he would continue the contract with Forks EMS for 60 days and would accept the \$10,000 from the township as payment on the debt.

Supervisor Erik Chuss suggested doing so, but Supervisors Chairman David Howell injected his reasons for not going in that direction.

Late Thursday, supervisors tabled the issue and agreed that Suburban and Forks should work out an agreement in which Suburban will do the billing for service calls.

In the past 12 months, Keifer said, the squad has paid off about \$15,000 in state and local taxes ignored by the former director. He said the squad is paying \$500 a month to the [IRS](#) on \$86,000 owed in payroll taxes from prior years, and has met every monthly payment for its 12 employees.

Keifer said he will work with Albertson to set up a plan to make regular payments on the debt.

The squad suspended operations in 2006 when the unpaid bills and loans were revealed.

The former director of squad operations, Cory S. Dailey of Fountain Hill, was charged in 2006 with stealing more than \$21,000 from the squad and misusing the squad-issued credit card. Dailey pleaded guilty and was sentenced in November 2007 to three to 12 months in jail and was required to make restitution.

Keifer said the EMS has made monthly reports to the supervisors, showing an increase in transports and calls and that bills are being paid. Keifer said transports last year were five to 10 a month and have increased recently to about 40 a month. And for the past 12 months, calls to the Forks station totaled about 1,300.

"There are still a lot of people who do not realize we are a separate entity, not a part of the township. We are a nonprofit, incorporated. We raise money through subscriptions and donations," Keifer said.

Keifer said the squad is looking forward to the next subscription drive in September. "That is where we get the bulk of our funding and which will be used to help clear off the balance of our debts," he said.

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